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Carvings and Sculptures
OF
WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

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BY
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WORCESTER.

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P R E F A C E.



N apology is due from the Author of this Work to his numerous Subscribers for the great and unexpected delay which has occurred in its publication. This delay, which has been a source of grievous disappointment and much loss to the Author himself, was occasioned by the non-fulfilment of a contract or agreement by the gentleman who was to have supplied the literary or descriptive matter for this Work. Under these circumstances, and at the Author's request, Mr. NOAKE kindly consented to furnish such a brief descriptive account of the Carvings and Sculptures in Worcester Cathedral as his opportunities of studying them permitted.

The production of this Work has been attended with much labour and difficulty. From the position in which the Carvings and Sculptures are placed, the Photographer had to contend with cross-lights, which cast little if any shadow, or with the insufficient light which struggled through stained glass windows. In some instances he despaired of producing a *fac-simile* except by the use of artificial light; and two or three of the Sculptures could not be taken at all, owing to the existence of a large monument in front of them, which prevented the erection of the necessary scaffolding.

The Visitor to the Cathedral who takes this book in his hand should be informed that the attention of the Photographer was not directed to the new Sculptures which are intermixed with the old work delineated in the following pages, but was entirely devoted to the latter.

Worcester, November, 1873.



The Sculptures and Carvings in Worcester Cathedral.



AMONG the most interesting items of the restoration which has been going on for many years in Worcester Cathedral is that of the ancient monastic stalls in the choir of that building, and the valuable and curious carvings attached to their *subslabae*. There seems to be no doubt, from authentic records which have been handed down, as well as from the style of the workmanship and the subjects embraced, that these carvings and the stalls to which they belong were first produced in the year 1307; and although the choir was re-arranged in 1551, and new canopy work was then erected above the stalls, the old *miserere* seats were fortunately retained; they likewise survived the iconoclastic period and the civil wars; but in the early part of the present

century, Mr. ST. JOHN, the then Treasurer to the Dean and Chapter, caused the greater portion of the carvings to be removed, and fixed them as a screen to a compo screen which he had erected beneath the organ, and which separated the choir from the nave. Here they remained till the year 1875 when the screen was removed, and the carvings carefully preserved by the architect (the late Mr. PERKINS) until the restoration of the old stalls enabled him to reinsert them in their original positions. Competent artists and workmen have been employed in cleansing them and making good all defective work, and the series (37 in number) is perhaps one of the best preserved and most interesting of the kind in England. Such works as these are valuable, not only as specimens of mediæval art, but as illustrating very directly and significantly the literature and the social and intellectual history of the period to which they belong. First, they bear largely on natural history, and indicate an acquaintance with the histories, or treatises on beasts, which then existed, as also with the extraordinary tales of travellers from foreign parts with reference to the monsters alleged to have been seen in distant regions. The fables and romances of the time are also represented—the calendars, or ecclesiastical almanacks, in which the domestic or agricultural employments of each month are depicted at the top, or on the margins of each page—popular habits and domestic scenes—Scripture history—chivalry, sports, customs, employments, and no small proportion of entire antagonism between monks, friars, and seculars. With such a range of subjects it will at once be seen how important and valuable are such collections of materials for the formation of a true idea of the character and habits of our forefathers. To the historian and antiquary they are equally of value, and the general reader cannot fail to be pleased and instructed by the glimpses which they give upon the habits and manners—curious, inexplicable, and even grotesque, as they may be—of those who have so long ago fitted their minds for the life of the

of human existence, and passed away, leaving behind them monuments of their skill and strong religious faith which have not been surpassed by the aspirations of any later generation.

It is to be regretted that the carvings have not been arranged in anything like consecutive order in regard to the subjects (thus: Religion, Nos. 19 to 23; Ceremonies, 7 and 9; Sacred, 10, 27, 31; Domestic, 2, 3; Agricultural and Rural, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 27, 29, 30, 36; Miscellaneous, 5, 12, 15).

Other portions of the stalls besides the *subilia* are adorned with interesting carvings, such as the finials of the arms and sides of the seats which represent costume, armour, foliage, heads and bodies of men and monsters, several modes of dressing the human hair, and in one instance a man wearing very curious clogs or pattens.

These stall carvings in wood are second only in interest to the earlier (13th century) arcade sculptures in stone of the upper transepts and Lady Chapel of the Cathedral, where will be found *inter alia* an architect represented as presenting his plans for the erection of the building to an ecclesiastic, who may be the prior of the monastery, or at least a monk. This specimen is figured in "Carter's Ancient Architecture," and was commented on by the *Archæological Journal*, vol. 4, p. 18, thus: "It is not easy to make out anything more than on the tablets (held in the architect's hands), but if any propriety is to be observed, it seems clear that the tablets must have been of wood, or thin stone, for he could not hold them as he is there represented. . . . It is curious, however, that the architect has also what appears to be a roll of parchment in his left hand, compared with its length, that it seems very probable that it is a list of the work to be done, or something in the nature of an estimate. . . . The architect has in his hand something which appears like a level, square, or the representa-

tion of it is so rude that one can hardly draw any conclusions. There are few, if any, similar illustrations of early designs for a building. The instrument by the side of the architect seems to be a square. In the north aisle of the Lady Chapel, on one of the arcade spaces, a representation of the completion of the architect's design, namely, a bishop or other ecclesiastic, offering up the model of a completed cathedral at the altar, is supposed to refer to the dedication of this building; besides which will be seen in these sculptures, birds, animals, monsters, masks, and foliage, beautifully carved, and especially the visitor must be attracted to the upper south transept, where the principal subject is the Day of Doom, or the Last Judgment. Paintings of this subject are not unusual in mural spaces of old churches, but it is comparatively rare to find it sculptured. Here may be seen the angel blowing the last trump, and the tombs giving up their dead. The tombs are represented by angular lines, like the lids of coffins partly open. The weighing of souls—a task usually assigned to Michael the Archangel—is shown, with a balance being attempted to influence the scale against the interests of the perishing. This is a common representation, but in some instances the Virgin appears to assist the righteous and frustrate the malice of Satan. The redeemed are then led to the gates of heaven, while the lost are being led away, carried or dragged into the conventional hell-mouth—the large and expanded jaws of a hideous monster. The figures of many of these demons seem to have been chosen as objects on which to exercise the sculptor's skill in baroque and grotesque, and it cannot be denied that much which is essentially comic is frequently mixed up with these solemn and fearful subjects. This was in accordance with the universal popular taste at a time when religious plays and mysteries most strangely mixed up solemnity with mirth, religion with superstition, and truth with fable.







































We now proceed to describe the various subjects of the carvings on the monastic stalls.

STALL CARVINGS.

1. An old man seated on a semicircular arm-chair on three legs before a fire, on which a pot is placed, the contents of which he is stirring. Above the chimney (which at that period denoted the house to be of some consequence) a dog or cat is warming itself at the same fire, and two fitches of bacon are hung on the wall. The man has taken off his boots and is warming his feet; his gloves are remarkable for being two-fingered, and all the details of the picture are curious. Domestic scenes were frequently depicted by the mediæval carvers, and a cast of one is shown at Kensington Museum, of nearly the same date as this at Worcester, in which two females have quarrelled before a kitchen fire about a piece of meat which one of them has taken from the pot, and they are evidently fighting, the one with a ladle and the other with a bellows.

2. A man playing some instrument—probably a flute—but the latter has disappeared. The flute is not so frequently seen in carvings of this kind as the pipe, tabor, and viol. The man wears a cap of the period, with his hair flowing out horizontally on each side of his face in that characteristic manner which proves that in the fourteenth century these hair fopperies were not confined to women. He has also a girdle round his coat. The supporters are lions, and foliage.

3. A crowned lion in centre, and on each side of the seat a figure in a mask. These masks occur in many instances as supporters, or as adjuncts to the principal figures, showing them to have been uppermost in the minds of the carvers, and probably referring to the custom of wearing them in the religious plays or mysteries at that time performed in our churches and street.

4. An angel playing a viol and sitting beneath a canopy having an arch, crocketed and finialled. The viol, or fiddle, sustained its place in the highest rank of musical instruments throughout the best part of the middle ages. The supporters here are two masks, similar to those of No. 3.

5. A gentleman standing, wearing a cap, with hood drawn over his ears. He is enveloped in a cloak, and wears a sword; he also holds in each hand a large branch of fully-developed foliage, or roses. Supporters: griffins, with club feet. Great partiality was always shown by the carvers for curiosities of every kind, but especially those of compounded figures, in some of which (as we shall presently see) one figure is frequently made up of parts of beasts, birds, and reptile forms, added to the human.

6. A butcher killing an ox. The animal is recumbent, and appears to be unconscious of his approaching fate, while the butcher holds an axe over his head. The man wears an apron and sharpened knives.

7 and 9. Probably the circumcision of Christ and his visit to the Temple when twelve years old. In both instances the parents accompany the child and are dressed in the costume of the fourteenth century: the man wearing robes and having his hair in large curls, and the woman has a square head-dress. In No. 7 the infant is sucking the breast, and the father holds the knife with which the rite of circumcision is to be performed. In No. 9 the youth is standing at an altar with hands uplifted: on the altar is a taper and above it a censer, also a crown resting on a bracket. The mother carries in her hand a tankard. In Carter's "Ancient Sculpture and Painting" this subject is described—but I think erroneously—as a king and queen dedicating their daughter to the service of the Church. Supporters: grotesque bearded bald human heads, with wings to the body and club feet. See remarks on No. 5.

8. A boar. It cannot escape notice how frequently the porcine race is introduced into these carvings, together with acorns, oak foliage, &c. of course in illustration of the times when the country was mainly covered with extensive forests, in which millions of these animals found pannage at certain seasons and in their turn yielded their flesh as sustenance to their owners. The consumption of so much salted meat throughout the winter, when neither the turnip cultivation nor adequate provision of hay for the cattle in the winter had yet led to the supply of fresh meat in that season, occasioned the frequency of scurvy and other diseases, to us of the present day comparatively unknown.

10. A female figure—or it may be a monk—sitting on a throne, the end of which is enriched with an ogree trefoiled arch, having roses and foliage in the spandrels. The figure wears a hood and cape, or gown fitting tight to the neck, and large loose sleeves. He or she is writing in a book on a desk or lectern, while with the left hand he is taking something which seems to be intended for an ink bottle from a large bird standing at the feet; and a smaller bird is being attacked and gobbled up by a dog, whose head peeps out from beneath the cape worn by the woman or monk. It is supposed this is a satirical subject, suggestive of false doctrine, but it has not yet been explained satisfactorily. Supporters: on the right a hunter bearing a rabbit on a pole upon his shoulder; other rabbits retreating into burrows in a bank of earth, with a greyhound seizing one of them; on the left a boy picking fruit from a tree. This piece of carving, and some others of the series, show marks of foliage outlined by the artist on the blank surfaces of the wood, but the work was never completed.

11. Probably an agriculturist sowing seed. He has a scythe at his side, strapped over his shoulder, and on the ground on each side of him is a larger basket, or pannier. His right hand seems in the act of casting seed to the ground. The toes of his boots are pointed in a peculiar manner apparently an elongation for the great toe only. The supporters on either side of the principal carving are birds with wings displayed.

STALL CARVINGS.

12. A tilting scene between two knights fully armed, on horseback, with their respective squires behind. This is a very interesting work of art, and its details may be advantageously studied, as well as the grouping and dramatic treatment of the whole subject. One of the knights is being unhorsed by the stronger arm of his opponent; and a poor squire, or drummer, in apprehension of being rode over and put to grief, presents a ludicrously rueful countenance, as he has been beating a pair of drums (then called *tabors*), but has dropped one of the sticks, and is falling backwards in a great fright, his feet being raised in the air as if to prop up his master's falling fortunes. The other squire blows a curious kind of serpentine horn, or trumpet. The falling knight has broken his spear, and his horse has been thrown on its hind quarters, while the knight's foot, having a sharp-pointed boot, spurred, has slipped out of the stirrup. The action throughout is natural, and the execution of the work clever. Mr. Wright, in his "History of Caricature," informs us that representations of tournaments were extremely popular, not only in carvings, but in illuminations, and he gives a specimen from "Queen Mary's Psalter," where the contest is between monkeys, and the parody is completed by the introduction (as in the Worcester example) of a trumpeter on one side, and a tabor drum beater on the other, only that all the parties concerned are monkeys, this being purely a caricature device.

13. An angel playing a lyre or lute. Supporters: Two faces or masks.

14. A huntsman sounding his horn, which winds round his body. Supporters: Double-headed eagles. The eagle in this form was generally the crest of the German Emperor.

15. A knight, with helmet, shield, and drawn sword. On the shield is a bear sejant, which may refer to Urso d'Abitot, or the Earls of Warwick. The knight has a drawn sword, and is doing battle with a brace of griffins, or monsters, composed of beasts' heads, bodies of birds, wings, and snaky terminations. Supporters: Two broad faces or masks.

16. Three men, reaping corn with sickles. Supporters: Three sheaves on each side.

17. Three men engaged in harvesting, perhaps forming the wheat into sheaves, but the instruments or objects they hold being all broken off, it is not clear what act they are engaged in. The men wear the flat cap and the horizontal wings of hair (if they may be so described) on each side of the face. Supporters: A sphinx, or an angel, with the body of a beast, playing a viol; another playing a dulcimer, and a second pair of hands falls down by the side of the instrument, apparently useless.

18. Three men, mowing grass with scythes. One of the supporters is a curious illustration of the love of satire and caricature which prevailed in the days when monks, friars, and regular clergy, were mutually hostile to each other, each party subjecting the other to ridicule and contempt whenever an occasion presented itself: a wolf in sheep's clothing (otherwise a clerical character is either preaching or saying grace over the head of a sheep which he is supposed to have just decapitated; the head being placed on a table, pulpit, or altar, before him. It has been truly observed that in the middle ages no caricature was

received with greater favour than those which exposed the immorality or dishonesty of a monk or priest, who was usually typified by a fox or wolf. One of the most humorous instances of this was in St. Martin's Church, Leicester, where a fox was represented as preaching to a congregation of geese, whom he addresses in these words: "Testis est mihi Deus, quam cupiam vos omnes describeris meis" (God is my witness how I long after you all in my bones). The other supporter of this seat is a rabbit or hare riding on a greyhound. Mr. Wright, whom I have before quoted, shows that the idea of reversing the position of men and animals, and representing the latter as treating their human tyrant in the same manner as they are usually treated by him, is an ancient one; and that at a later period it became common to carry out the idea with animals only—such as the rats hanging the cat (as on one of the Great Malvern stalls), the geese subjecting Reynard to the same fate (as at Sherborne Minster, Dorset), a mouse chasing a cat, the horse driving the cart, or, as at Worcester, the hare riding the greyhound—in all such cases justice being emphatically represented as at length in the hands of the persecuted.

19. Abraham and his son Isaac, the former carrying in one hand the fire in a brazier for the sacrifice, and in the other a sword; while the latter is loaded with sticks. On either side of this seat are beasts with men's heads-capped, with large feathers in the caps.

20. The temptation in Eden. The serpent is represented with the body of a dragon, winding round the tree, having the head of a beast with long ears. In many instances the mediæval carvers placed upon Satan the head of a beautiful woman, thus favouring the idea of evil originating with the female sex. The side supporters of this seat are double eagles.

21. The expulsion from Paradise. Our first parents, retiring before an angel with a drawn sword, are applying the fig leaves. Supporters: a bird on each side.

22. Abraham offering up his son. An angelic hand issuing from a cloud grasps the point of the patriarch's sword to prevent the sacrifice, while Isaac kneels on the altar in a supplicating attitude. Supporters: men's heads wearing caps, and the usual great masses of hair.

23. A subject supposed to represent Moses come down from the mount with the tables, and witnessing the idolatry of the Israelites. There are two other figures, one of which may be Aaron. The object of idolatrous worship, however, is apparently not a calf, but a large bird, with a head which is not easy to describe, having been mutilated; it may have had human features, but it is more likely a beast's, and may possibly be a calf's head, and is provided with long ears. The creature stands on a pillar. Moses is distinguished by his usual appendage of horns on the head; and the third figure, which appears from behind, may be intended to represent God the Father, inspiring Moses with zeal to put down the idolatrous worship. It was not unusual to represent the First Person in the Trinity as a majestic old man, "the Ancient of days," with long flowing hair and beard, as in this case. On each side of this principal group are serpents entwined, with calf-like heads. This may have reference to the ancient serpent worship; but serpentine forms, either alone or in combination with animal or human shapes, were among the most common and favourite forms of ornamentation, in sculpture and pictorial illumination, from the earlier Saxon times to the decline of art previous to the Reformation.

24. The judgment of Solomon. The King, with the Queen on his right, and a minister or officer of state on the left, sit each under an ogee-arched canopy. The officer bears a sword, and is about to divide the living child which a woman in the side niche carries in her arms. In the opposite niche is the woman with the dead child, wrapped in its burial clothes. The details of this carving are interesting with regard to costume and architecture.

25. A man riding a lion, holding its jaws with both hands. Is this intended for Samson, or David, or neither? The animal is remarkably tranquil if he is undergoing "capital punishment," but it is not unusual in such mediæval works, the artists not being very skilful in representing action in animals.

26. Two men standing, with the position of their hands and general attitude as though in the act of disputation. They each hold a long roll, as of parchment. Were they intended for lawyers disputing? Supporters: bearded and winged monsters with grotesque heads. It may be added to what has been said before on the subject of monsters, that in the middle ages a general belief prevailed in the existence of such creatures, which belief was much fostered by the extraordinary tales told in those days by travellers as to the wonders they had seen, or heard of, in various parts of the world.

27. A swincherd, striking down acorns from a tree with a staff, for two pigs underneath. The minor carvings on each side consist of foliage.

28. A conflict between a lion and a dragon. Supporters: a lion on one side and a dragon on the other.

29. Sow and five pigs, with conventional foliage at the sides.

30. A king or crowned personage, with a horse richly caparisoned, led by a page. The gentleman has had a hawk on his fist, but only the claws of the bird are left. Supporters: men's heads, with hair on each side projecting in stiff horizontal masses, or layers.

31. A sphinx, or female head, on body and two fore legs of an animal, hoofed; the body terminating in a long, tapering, crocodile shape; there are wings on the body, and from the back issues a smaller head, of a youthful figure, looking in an opposite direction from the principal head. The supporter on that side is the kneeling figure of a man, having a satchel strapped and dependent from his waist; he wears gloves, but that on the left hand is enlarged to a size sufficient to cover the whole body, and the hand is clenched as in the act of boxing, and directed near to the face of the head which issues from the back of the principal figure. The other supporter is a bird of prey, picking its quarry to pieces.

32. A lion having the head of a woman, and wearing a square ruff, dress or cap, its flowing border almost like curls. Supporters: birds, web-footed.

33. A cockatrice, or monster, composed of a cock's head and breast with two legs of a quadruped, and a tail terminating in a serpentine form. Supporters: dogs, or wolves, bearing small branches in their mouths.

34. A woman riding on a ram or goat. She is nude, with only a net of very large meshes thrown over her, and she carries a rabbit under her arm. This is perhaps a representation of the mediæval mode of punishing incontinence, the offender being compelled to ride in this fashion through the streets of the town, repeating a coarse doggerel verse in confession of her infamy. The supporters to this seat are masks with foliage.

35. A woman with a distaff, and a man digging with a spade. The woman wears the square head-dress of the time, and the specimen is interesting for its illustration of costume, and likewise reminding the observer of the old couplet—

“When Adam delved and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman?”

The supporters are grotesque monsters, with the heads of men and women, legs and feet of quadrupeds, and wings of birds; and they wear caps, the tops of which taper off into necks and heads of birds or fowls, somewhat representing the caps of jesters or court fools.

36. A stag couchant underneath a tree. Conventional foliage on each side.

37. A dragon or wyvern, having on either side a monster, partly bird and partly beast. These monstrous forms were great favourites with the Teutonic race, and are continually seen in illuminated writings from the time of the Anglo-Saxons downwards.

















THE ARCADE SCULPTURES.

PASSING through the south aisle of the choir, we descend to the crypt, with transept, around which, as also the north transept, the last of the arcades. In its aisles, a trefoiled arcading is continued, with a round head of sculpture on each capital and legendary subjects, many of which, however, are new (and some of them here described), having been restored or renewed by Boulton & Co. in 1845. In the south transept, commanding at its base, we come to the subject of the Final Doom. The first figure, which we shall notice is—

1. The Saviour, crossed and nimbed, sitting on his Throne of Judgment, with the heavenly host on the right and left. Part of the right arm of the chief figure has been destroyed. The manner in which the figures are draped is worthy of notice, as also are the throne and its accessories, the cushion, footstool, &c.

2. An angel holding what appears to be a cross, the principal subject of which is destroyed.

3. An angel blowing the last trumpet.

4. The dead rising from their tombs. These would appear to be resting on stone coffins with slab coverings, as usual at the period.

5. The righteous being led by an angel to the gates of heaven.

6. The angel driving Adam and Eve from Paradise with a spade, and Eve a distaff. See the *Register* (1874) N. 188 (Carvings.)

7. Being bound hand and foot, to be cast into outer darkness.

8. The conventional hell-mouth, or expanded jaws full of lost souls; but a savage demon is lashing his tail around condemned wretches, preparing to cast them into the pit. His satisfaction in the act, as contrasted with the despair depicted in the countenances of his victims, is admirably delineated by the sculptor.

9. A sinner suffering the pains of the purgatorial fire.

10. The weighing of souls. An imp is attempting to kick against the interest of the poor soul. I have heard of an instance of this subject in other buildings, where the Virgin interrupted the act of kicking away the imp. The date of the Worcester is anterior to the fuller development of Mariolatry may account for the absence of the Virgin in this instance.

11. A conflict between a man and a demon, or which is more generally known incident in the life of David, or which is more generally intended to represent one phase of Christian warfare. As these interesting arcades, other examples of the same subject, men and monsters, the latter typifying passions, temptations, and varied temptations, confront the Christian.

12. A Sagittarius, or centaur. This was the subject of the mosaic in the apse of the church of St. Peter at Ravenna, and sometimes occurs in edifices erected in the same style. It may not be the subjects of this and the adjoining scriptural figures, but the two signs of the zodiac, Leo and Sagittarius.

On leaving this transept we pass into the Lady Chapel, and find the first subject (south aisle) that attracts the attention:

13. An architect or clerk of the works exhibiting a plan of a building (it may be the cathedral itself or some portion of it) to an ecclesiastic. A description of these figures appears in an Italian work.

14. An artist or sculptor exhibiting to a lady some specimen of his work which has the appearance of being a carved head.

15. Monks engaged in one of the handicrafts then prevalent in a monastery, and it appears to be shoe-making or working in leather.

16. Another conflict between an armed man and one of the family of vampires, harpies, or monstrous creatures in which the sculptors were so prolific.

17. A dog or lion, with eagle's head, paying homage to a king.

18. A knight, riding to the fray, with dragon at his heels.

19. An animal, consisting of a dog's head, the body of a serpent, and the legs and feet of a lion, or a snake.

20. A cockatrice.

21. A bird, having a shield attached to its neck and a cross on its back.

22, 23, and 24. Three charming specimens of English art in the most fanciful and monstrous forms.

25. A bishop offering a cathedral on an altar. All the other subjects are interesting. The bishop has entered by the priests of the sacrum, and having placed the model of a cathedral on the altar, is in the act of kneeling before it. Above, on the left, is the emblem of the Holy Spirit, a dove, issuing from a cloud, and on the right a minister of justice. A trefoil-headed arch covers the bishop and his offering, and above the arch is a low superstructure of arcade work, tiled like the roof of a building. The arcades are round-headed, although otherwise lancet-shaped, and other architectural details indicate the Early English period. Probably this subject was intended to represent Bishop de Blois (1218--1227), in whose reign the choir and Lady Chapel were built (*verum opus factiss*) by the will of the king, which at that time was paying in at the shrine of St. Wulfstan of Hereford. The sanctity and miracles attracted pilgrims from all parts of the kingdom.

26. A peasant scotching a monstrous bird.

27. A fox or wolf, and cock, probably referring to some local legend.

28. The annunciation by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary.

29. The salutation of the Virgin and Child.

30. The Birth of the Saviour. In the foreground, a common form of bedstead is presented. In the background, of the bed, and an ox and an ass kneeling before it. There was a mediæval legend to the effect that the ox and ass fell on their knees in honour of the Saviour.

31. Subject unknown.

32. Probably a monk chastising a scholar.



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